

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
As a Committee of the Whole
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 2021, at 6:00 p.m.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
WOBURN CITY HALL

Voting Members present: Chairman Darlene Mercer-Bruen, Alderman Michael Concannon,
President Edward Tedesco, Alderman Michael Lannan, Alderman Jeffrey Dillon, Alderman
Joseph Demers, Alderman Joanne Campbell, and Alderman Richard Gately. Absent: Alderman
Robert Ferullo

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MOTION made by President Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Demers to dispense with the reading of the meeting minutes from May 10, 2021; May 27, 2021; June 2, 2021; and June 3, 2021; and to approve; all in favor, 5-0.

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Discussion of the FY 2022 Budget: Recreation – Recreation Director Rory Lindstrom said she is looking forward to a fairly normal summer. She said the pools were open for six weeks last summer, but they will be open for a longer time frame this summer. She said she is also looking forward to a more normal school year in the fall. She said the Recreation Dept. has been utilizing Spence Farm. She said that has been a great space. Alderman Gately asked if the Recreation Dept. is still receiving money in the budget for adaptive programs. Director Lindstrom answered affirmatively. She said the department plans to integrate a few more adaptive programs. She said they are trying to incorporate as many adaptive programs as they can. Alderman Gately asked if \$12,000 is enough money. Director Lindstrom the funding should be sufficient for now. Alderman Gately said the Recreation Dept. does a great job. Chairman Mercer-Bruen said the Recreation Dept. has always done a great job. She thanked Director Lindstrom for persevering through a difficult summer last year. **Engineering** – City Engineer John Corey said his departmental budget is level funded and adequate for day-to-day operations. He said any major expenditures are usually addresses in a capital budget outlay. Alderman Gately said Engineer Corey and his staff do a tremendous job, especially with all that is going on in the city, and with all that is coming up. He said if the Engineer's office has any part-time help. Engineer Corey said they have one intern who is finishing his first year of college. Chairman Mercer-Bruen thanked Engineer Corey for all the assistance he and his staff have given her over the years. **Health** – Chairman Mercer-Bruen thanked Health Agent John Fralick and his staff for their effort during a year that included a global pandemic. Agent Fralick said his budget is level funded and in fact may be a little less than it was last year. He said his departmental budget has essentially been the same for 32 years and there have been very few changes over that time. Alderman Gately asked about the status of the city's rat problem. Agent Fralick said rats are everywhere. He said he has already gotten more complaints this year about rats than he did all of last year. He said any construction displaces the rats and sends them running elsewhere. Alderman Gately said he noticed the price of rubbish removal is going up. Agent Fralick said the

trash removal contract increased 11 percent from last year. He said he and Mayor Galvin negotiated a great contract with Waste Management. He said the final version of the contract was \$600,000 less than the original proposal. He said the refuse removal provided by the city is the best service anyone can get. He said people like that they can put just about anything at the curb and it will be taken away. He said Woburn's per capita costs trash removal is less than every surrounding town except Wilmington. He said when you factor in the level of service, there is no community better than Woburn as far as trash removal is concerned. He said people appreciate they can throw away what they need to throw away. He said the trash removal contract is great for the city. He said it is probably the last one he will negotiate. Chairman Mercer-Bruen thanked Agent Fralick and his staff. She said the past year has been particularly hard on the Health Dept.

Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational High School – Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational High School Director of Finance James Picone said he is joined in the City Council Chamber by Deborah Davis, Chairman of and Woburn's elected representative to the Northeast Voke School Committee; and Principal/Deputy Director Carla Scuzzarella. Mr. Picone said Superintendent-Director David DiBarri is in transit. Mr. Picone said he sent two sets of documents to the council, and he has brought paper copies tonight for distribution. Motion made by President Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Demers to receive and make part of the permanent records documents entitled "Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School FY '22 Budget Presentation to FinCom April 21, 2021," and "Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational School FY 2022 Draft Budget March 11, 2021," approved, 8-0. Mr. Picone said he is happy to provide an update to Northeast Voke's member communities. He said he understands there are financial constraints under Proposition 2 ½. Mr. Picone referred to the handout dated April 21, 2021. He said Northeast Voke is committed to providing an adequate level of funding. He said they want to be an excellent vocational school. He said Northeast Voke is required to allocate funding under the Student Opportunity Act. Mr. Picone said the school has a benchmark of a 3 percent increase. He said the increase came in at 3 percent exactly. He said pre-Covid, the expected budget was \$11.5 million. Once Covid hit, Mr. Picone said their budget was reduced to \$10.7 million in the middle of December and they had to make cuts. He said this was accomplished with no reduction in staff. He said the proposed FY '22 budget still does not match the proposed pre-Covid FY '21 budget. He said there were challenges but they figured it out. He said they used \$3.2 million from other funding sources to offset member assessments. He said the school was required to fund the Student Opportunity Act. He said they had to fund a new contract with employees, as well as Other Post-Employment Benefits. He said five positions related to the Student Opportunity Act were created. He said they had to fund a robotics teacher whose salary was transferred from a grant to the budget. He said capital expenditures were reduced by \$100,000 and a contracted service was reduced by \$18,942. He said the supplies line item is nearly level funded, with a reduction of \$3,000. He said the equipment request is level funded. He said the total amount the budget is increasing is \$1.099 million or 3.82 percent, which results in an increased assessment of \$450,186. He said Woburn's assessment increased by \$37,445. Alderman Campbell said every year it is quite impressive how Northeast Voke officials are able to remain within their budget parameters and still provide excellent services. She said she knows that was not an easy task this year. Mr. Picone said it has not been an easy year. Alderman Gately said he goes through Northeast Voke's budget every year and the administration does an amazing job. He said he was impressed they were able to remain within their budget constraints without laying off staff. He asked about the status of the new school building. Superintendent-Director DiBarri arrived at City Hall. Superintendent-Director DiBarri

said the new school building is proceeding as planned. He said the administration hopes to meet with members communities soon to give them an idea of what the cost will be. He said the state is expected to reimburse the district for 79 percent of the costs of the new building, which is an increase from previous percentage and will make a huge difference for Woburn. He said they continue to seek more federal and state funding. He said they have tried everything. He said they are working with the Mass. School Building Authority to change their outdated processes for vocational schools. He said Northeast Voke is trying to take the lead to lobby for change. He said he would like to talk to the mayor about vocational schools being excluded from Proposition 2 ½ limitations. He said the administration's goal is to minimize the financial impact on cities and towns in the district. He said they do not want to bankrupt any city or town, but the current school building is at the end of the road. He said they have been asking different branches of government for money. He said they asked Sen. Markey for \$100 million. He said Sen. Markey told him he just gave \$8 billion to Gov. Baker, so he should talk to the governor. He said the administration feels aid should come to cities and town like Woburn. He said all cities and towns are struggling financially. Chairman Davis said the administration has established a website for the new building. She said they have also established pages on Facebook and Twitter, where people can see the design. She said construction of the new building will have minimal impact on the existing building. She said after the new building is open, they will demolish the old school. She said they reduced the size of the new building to keep the cost of blasting down. She said the administration is excited about the new moving. She said plans are moving along. Chairman Mercer-Bruen thanked the Northeast Voke officials for attending the Finance Committee meeting. She said every year the administration comes to the council with a budget that has been prepared almost like a family sitting around a table preparing its own budget. She said the work Northeast Voke does is amazing. **Woburn Public Schools** – School Committee Chairman Ellen Crowley said many, many hours of debate among school officials and work by Asst. Supt. for Finance & Operations Robert Alconada went into preparing the school budget. Chairman Crowley said she would like to thank the teachers for their perseverance during the school year. She said the School Dept. staff is amazing. She said this is the most expansive budget the School Committee has ever presented. She said it is hard to quantify how many improvements they are planning. She said there is a \$1 million outlay for new curriculum. She thanked the City Council for the support it has given the School Dept. over the years. Supt. of Schools Dr. Matthew Crowley offered a handout to the Liaison Committee. Motion made by President Tedesco and seconded by Alderman Demers to accept and make part of the permanent records an undated document entitled "WPS FY22 Woburn Public School Blueprint for our future;" approved, 8-0. Dr. Crowley read the language on the front page, as follows: "The Woburn Public Schools is an innovative, progressive district with rigorous academic standards and pro-active social-emotional supports. We are dedicated to the success of all students while challenging them to meet their maximum potential. Our students are problem solvers and resilient risk takers who aspire to create change in the world. They are diverse, confident, valued and have a strong sense of pride in their community. In Woburn, all stakeholders are engaged, and effectively communicate and advocate for the resources necessary to prepare our students for their best future." He said that passage was written before Covid. He said he appreciates the support the administration has gotten from the City Council, Mayor Galvin, and the School Committee. He acknowledged the retirement of Asst. Supt. for Curriculum & Instruction Wendy Sprague after 39 years. He said Asst. Supt. for Student Services Michael Baldassarre is in the chamber. Referring to page 2 of the document he distributed to the committee, Dr. Crowley said

69 percent of the students in the district are white and 30 percent are minorities. He said it is a challenge to educate an increasingly diverse population. He said 20.7 percent of students do not speak English as their first language and 8 percent are English language learners, meaning 28 percent are not hearing English when they are not at school. He said this is a rapid change. He said this is an increase of 100 percent from five years ago. He said 47 percent of students are classified as high needs. Referring to page 3 of the handout, Dr. Crowley said last July they had no clue how to plan a budget that involved a hybrid learning system. He said he is so proud of the staff that developed the hybrid model, which he said remained in place until April. He said Woburn High graduation was held on Sunday and it felt like 2019 again. He said more than 500 students in the district are still learning at home. He said the administration had to figure out how to do that. He said the challenges due to Covid were overwhelming. He said they made it through. He said one of the silver linings has been 1-on-1 technology. He said iPads were issued to all students in kindergarten through grade 2. He said Chromebooks were issued to students in grades 3-12. He said there was a lot they learned during the pandemic. He said they partnered with the Boys & Girls Club and the YMCA for supervised learning. He said community involvement has been tremendous. He said curriculum is aligned with all teachers in the same grade. He said the high school was recognized as one of the top high schools in the country according to U.S. News & World Report. He said June 21 is the last day for students. He said June 25 is the last day for teachers. He said staff will take a week off and then start summer programming. He said there are 447 students in grades K-5 who will be attending summer school and 150 middle and high school students who will be attending summer school. He said there will be learning loss programs. Dr. Crowley referred to page 4 of his handout. He said he and Mr. Alconada met regularly with City Auditor Charles Doherty and Mayor Galvin to discuss budgetary matters. He said they are trying to improve the process. He said the School Dept. offered early retirement incentives which were accepted by a handful of staff who were not going to retire but opted to retire after this year. Dr. Crowley referred to page 5 of his handout. He said there were a number of grants that were obtained with the assistance of the city. He said they are entering the third year of a \$164,000 grant. He said the 4-year, \$100,000 Cummings grant is huge for the School Dept. He said the Kennedy and Joyce middle schools will each receive \$25,000 grants. Dr. Crowley referred to page 6 of his handout. He said the budget will increase by 3.5 percent, which includes a 1 percent pay increase for union employees. He said their contract is for one year. He said ESSR 2 and ESSR 3 on the handout refers to the amount of federal stimulus money the district received. He said the ESSR 2 money (\$1,960,160) paid for staffing of virtual schools. He said the administration is looking to set up a stabilization fund for special education. He said as far as facilities are concerned, a lot of schools need attention. He said the Reeves Elementary School is already 20 years ago. He said he was proud that the city kept art and music programs during the pandemic. He said they are looking to expand the high school drama program. He said they are trying to build out the special education infrastructure. He said he would like to add an assistant principal to the Goodyear Elementary School.

Alderman Campbell said Dr. Crowley and the school officials have done an outstanding job, particularly with the budgetary aspects. She asked how many students will still be involved in hybrid learning in the fall. Dr. Crowley replied the goal is to have everyone return to the classroom in the fall. Alderman Campbell thanked the administration to retaining art and music during Covid. She said those programs allow students to express themselves. She said she is thrilled about the implementation of the new reading program. Dr. Crowley said the implementation of the reading program was planned despite the pandemic. He said a new writing

program was implemented at the elementary level, and it has been successful. He said the new reading program will have to undergo some professional development. Alderman Gately said the school system in Woburn is good. He said the city is able to take care of itself. He said the pandemic impacted communities all around Woburn financially, but Woburn was able to pay all of its bills. He said whatever the School Dept. is doing with the budget, they are doing it well. He said the School Dept. did a tremendous job. He said Dr. Crowley has a tremendous staff. Alderman Demers said he looked back at what the School Dept. dealt with in the last year and a half and it was their preparedness that made them ready. He said the investments they made are paying off now. He said he is excited to see how much resilience there is the School Dept. He said there is an attitude among school officials to turn a challenge into an opportunity. He said the School Dept. has great teachers and a great staff that he is sure are looking forward to a normal school year. Alderman Dillon thanked school officials for their work through a difficult school year. He said he has great nephews who attend Woburn schools and he takes them out to lunch to ask them how things are going. He said the responses are always positive. He said there was no blueprint for how to run a school system during a pandemic. He said he was glad to see the district managed to get in some sports during the school year. Dr. Crowley said the food service department also deserved some praise. He said the School Dept. has been serving meals since the pandemic started. He said there is food insecurity among the high needs population. He said they can have all the curriculum in the world but it will not mean a thing if the students are not also supplied with food and clothing. Alderman Concannon said he has seen the School Dept.'s operations during the pandemic up close and personal because he has attended the meetings. He said he is proud to support this budget. He said it is impressive how the administration and staff persevered through the pandemic. He thanked Dr. Crowley and the School Committee and for everything they have done to get the School Dept. where it is and asked them to pass along the council's appreciation to the school staff. Chairman Mercer-Bruen said she has seen how other communities struggled with the pandemic. She said she has a daughter who is a junior in high school and not only did she adapt to learning in the pandemic she also learned she has an aptitude for biology. She said she cannot thank school officials enough. She said it is impressive that the administration is going to implement new curriculum. She asked her fellow council members to rise and give an ovation to the school officials in the chamber. Dr. Crowley said he is glad the council recognizes how difficult a year it was for the School Dept.

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MOTION made by Alderman Concannon and seconded by Alderman Demers to adjourn; approved, 8-0. Chairman Mercer-Bruen adjourned the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

A TRUE RECORD ATTEST

Gordon Vincent
Clerk of Committees

